

PRODUCT SPECIFICATION
“West Country Farmhouse Cheddar”
PDO (*) PGI ()

1. Responsible department in the Member State:

Name: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)
 Area 3A
 Nobel House
 Smith Square
 London
 SW1P 3JR
 United Kingdom

Tel: 0207 238 6075

Fax: 0207 238 5728

Email: Protectedfoodnames@defra.gsi.gov.uk

2. Applicant Group:

Name: Farmhouse Cheesemakers Ltd (FCL)

Address: 23 Union Street
 Wells
 Somerset
 BA5 2PU

Tel: 0749 679279

Fax: 0749 670994

Email:

Composition: producer/processor (18)

FCL is a co-operative registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts whose members are dairy farmers who also produce West Country Farmhouse Cheddar on their farms. FCL was formed in 1981 from the membership of the Farmhouse Cheesemakers Federations (covering respectively Farmhouse Cheshire Cheese, Farmhouse Lancashire Cheese, Farmhouse Cheddar Cheese and Farmhouse Caerphilly) which were themselves formed between 1928 and 1932. FCL has two divisions. One deals exclusively with the interests of the Farmhouse Lancashire and Cheshire cheese makers (10 members all based in the counties of

Cheshire, Shropshire and Lancashire). The other deals exclusively with the interests of the Farmhouse Cheddar makers in the West Country ie the counties of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall (18 members).

All cheese made by members is sold to FCL who in turn have appointed a sole agent to market that product. In 1993, sales of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar by members of FCL amounted to some 12,000 tonnes, worth more than £66 million at retail selling prices. Most of this cheese was sold through retailers to the general public in the UK. Only limited volumes are exported.

Apart from the 18 Cheddar members of FCL, there are also a number of other farmhouse cheddar makers in the West Country. All of these were members of the Farmhouse Cheddar and Caerphilly Federation but now act independently in the marketing of their cheese. It is estimated that these other makers also produce somewhere in the region of 12,000 tonnes of cheese a year, most of which is Cheddar.

Should this application be successful, a number of these non members of FCL have already indicated that they would wish to use the EC designation. Subject to those makers agreeing to submit themselves to the proposed inspection and grading arrangements and to pay the normal fees involved, FCL would see this as a very positive development in improving the marketing of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar.

3. Type of product:

Cheese - Class 1.3

4. Specification (summary of requirements under Art. 7(1) of Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012)

4.1 Name:

“West Country Farmhouse Cheddar”

4.2 Description:

West Country Farmhouse Cheddar is made from cows' milk produced predominantly in the designated area, which may or may not have been pasteurised.

West Country Farmhouse Cheddar is only sold after it has been stored for at least 9 months.

West Country Farmhouse Cheddar may be produced in either a traditional cylinder shape (in varying sizes to suit the needs of different customers) or in a block form (again in varying sizes to suit the needs of different customers).

West Country Farmhouse Cheddar has the following characteristics:

- Flavour: A nutty, round flavour with a hint of sharpness
- Body: Internal - Firm with slightly open texture
External - Cylinders – regular shape, free of cracks
- Blocks – regular shape, free of cracks
- Colour: Internal - uniform consistent creamy yellow colour
- Fat: Minimum 48% fat in dry matter
- Moisture: Maximum moisture content – 39%
- Age: Matured for at least 9 months

4.3 Geographical area:

The historical Counties of Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall

Following the implementation of EC quotas, the consequent rigidity and decline in supply of milk has made it necessary to bring in milk from outside the designated area at times of shortage in order to continue production of the cheese at this time. Milk at this time is from the bordering counties of Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

4.4 Proof of origin:

Since a large proportion of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar is subsequently pre-packaged into consumer proportions or into quarters or other sizes, [logos] may be used on those packs provided that:

- Up to date records are maintained by the packer of the quantities of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar which have been delivered to the establishment and the quantities of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar have been despatched from the establishment
- These records are available for inspection by duly authorised persons

In addition, manufacturers of processed foods may use [logos] provided that the foods in question actually contain West Country Farmhouse Cheddar which meets

the aforementioned requirements. West Country Farmhouse Cheddar may have been processed in some way prior to its use for manufacture.

4.5 Method of production:

All farms making West Country Farmhouse Cheddar will use the same basic recipe but there will be slight variations in production between farms depending on the techniques used and the source of their milk.

Fresh cows' milk is collected regularly (and normally on a daily basis) from the farm(s) of the Farmhouse Cheddar Maker (in fact some 50% of all milk comes from the members' own farms) and where required from other farms. At most times of the year this milk will come from farms within the defined geographical area but there will be occasions when milk will be supplied from other parts of England eg to cover seasonal shortfalls in supplies.

The milk may be standardised according to season particularly when the natural balance in the milk between fat and casein differs significantly from a ratio of 1:0.7. milk is tested prior to use to determine its suitability for West Country Farmhouse Cheddar production.

If the maker produces West Country Farmhouse Cheddar from pasteurised milk, the milk will first be pasteurised. From here the process of manufacture is similar regardless of whether the milk is pasteurised or not.

The milk will be pumped into stainless steel vats and brought to the required temperature. Starter culture is then added to produce the acidity in the milk required during the early stages of cheese making. The starter is mixed into the milk before rennet (natural animal rennet or vegetable rennet) is added to coagulate the milk. After the milk has been allowed to coagulate to form a junket the curds are cut either by hand or by knives attached to paddles in the cheese vat. This process causes the junket to divide between the curds and whey which are then scalded at a temperature of around 103 to 106°F. This scalding process involves constant heating and stirring until the desired level of acidity is reached and the whey is extracted from the curds.

Throughout this process it is the skill of the cheesemaker which determines the correct balance between time, temperature and acidity necessary to make West Country Farmhouse Cheddar.

When the scalding is complete the curds and the whey have to be separated. This is done either in the cheese vat or on a cooling table. Surplus whey is allowed to drain off through wire strainers which prevents the loss of valuable curd. During this

separation process the curds have to be pulled back from the centre to allow a channel to be formed for effective drainage of the whey. The curds are then allowed to cool whence they are cut into large rectangular pieces reading for “cheddaring”. The “cheddaring” of the curds is a technique unique to the manufacture of Cheddar cheese. It is a labour intensive process which is still done by hand in the manufacture of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar. The rectangular pieces of curd are turned and stacked by hand on top of each other along the side of the vat or cooling table so assisting the drainage of the whey from the curd. This continues until the correct level of acidity is reached at which stage the curds are ready for milling.

Milling involves cutting the curd into small cubes after which it is salted and mixed thoroughly.

The salted curds are then put into moulds the shape and size of which will vary between different West Country Farmhouse Cheddar makers. Cylindrical moulds are used by some makers. Most makers will use rectangular moulds since blocks are better suited to the needs of supermarkets who sell most of their cheese in a pre packed form.

The cheese is pressed within the moulds to remove any excess moisture; each maker will vary the length of time for pressing and the pressure applied according to the cheesemaker’s preference. Some makers will then scald the cheeses by bathing them in hot water so as to seal them before returning them to the presses for a final pressing.

The process for wrapping West Country Farmhouse Cheddar after pressing may differ between cylinders and blocks.

In the case of cylinders, the cheeses are sealed either by bandaging them in muslin cloth that has been dipped in melted lard or a suitable natural fat or oil or by smearing this onto the outside of the cheese which is then bandaged. This bandaging helps form a hard rind on the cheese during maturation so allowing the cheese to breath, yet preventing mould penetration. This bandaging is removed prior to sale.

The cylindrical cheeses are placed in temperature and humidity controlled stores and are turned regularly to ensure an even distribution of moisture loss.

In the case of rindless rectangular blocks, the cheeses are wrapped after pressing in a food grade semi permeable membrane and then packed in wooden slats or boxes for ripening and maturing. Wrapped in this way the cheese does not lose moisture during maturation and so the maker will tend to produce a drier curd than would be

the case for a cylindrical cheese. Some cylindrical cheese is also packed in a similar way during the early stages of maturation before a rind is allowed to form.

Length of storage of both cylindrical and block West Country Farmhouse Cheddar will vary but it will be for a minimum of 9 months.

During the maturation process representative samples of cheeses produced from each vat will be graded at between 2 and 4 months of age to determine the development of the cheese. Cheese which is not expected to develop the necessary flavour characteristics associated with West Country Farmhouse Cheddar will be sold as standard Cheddar. After the required maturation period, the cheese will be reviewed and then selected according to the needs of individual customers.

4.6 Link

The variety “Cheddar” cheese is synonymous with the West Country. There is evidence to suggest that the variety was first made in the traditional cheese making County of Somerset, in the area of Cheddar, as far back as the 15th century. At this time Cheddar cheese was made exclusively on farms throughout the region and was generally sold at local markets. It was claimed that the best Cheddar was always made in the area around Cheddar Gorge, hence the adoption of the name. Tradition has it that all the cheese made near the Gorge was actually stored within the caves that stretch under the “Mendip Hills” because conditions there were ideal for the correct maturation.

The reputation of the cheese spread and with the growth of milk production, factories were built to make Cheddar on a larger scale not just within the UK but also in countries of the Commonwealth and the USA. Today the cheese is made throughout the world and Cheddar now describes the method of manufacture and the unique process of stacking and turning the curds designed to speed up the draining of the whey.

However, the traditions of Farmhouse Cheddar manufacture are still evident in the West Country and the product achieves wide recognition as a distinctive, full flavoured and mature Cheddar cheese made by traditional methods. The designation “West Country Farmhouse Cheddar” differentiates very clearly this Cheddar from that produced elsewhere in the UK by virtue of:

- its historical links with the original cheese producing area

- the source of milk
- the methods of manufacture
- its maturity, and
- its distinctive taste

Only Cheddar Cheese produced on farms within the County Boundaries (as defined in 1955) of the four Counties of Dorset, Devon, Somerset and Cornwall may carry this designation.

Although Cheddar is made throughout the world, there is undisputable evidence to show that Cheddar production originated on farms in the Cheddar area of Somerset. Production spread to farms in other parts of the West Country and descendants of those early producers are still involved in the manufacture of West Country Farmhouse Cheddar on their farms today. West Country farmhouse Cheddar has a unique flavour and taste and is still produced according to the original method using the skills and traditions handed on in the area. There is no evidence to suggest Cheddar cheese produced outside of the designated area has ever been referred to as West Country Farmhouse Cheddar.

The West Country is an area renowned for its dairying and milk production. This reputation rests on excellent pasturage arising from a uniform and relatively heavy rainfall, a temperate climate and distinctive soil types. These are predominantly clay with a loam base with influences from the limestone in the surrounding hills and peat from the moor areas. It is characteristically a brown soil.

Cheesemaking in the area is of ancient origin and the making of a long life stable cheese is intrinsically linked with production and storage in the Cheddar area. The cheesemaking skills involved spread from that area throughout the West Country many generations ago and the inherent skills have passed down from generation to generation.

The milk used in the manufacture of the cheese comes from cows grazed within the defined area of Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall. The source of milk to individual producers is varied, and this combined with the subtle skills of the individual master cheesemaker and the microclimate of each dairy produces a distinctive subtle flavouring for each producer.

The skill of the individual cheesemaker is to identify the milk best suited for cheesemaking and, if necessary, to blend the milk to produce one that is comparable to the ideal one.

4.7 Inspection body:

Name: Product Authentication Inspectorate (PAI)

Address: Rowland House,
65 High Street
Worthing
West Sussex BN11 1DN

Tel: 01903237799

Fax: 01903204445

Email: enquiries@thepaigroup.com

The inspection body is an official public body conforming to the principles of the EN 45011 standard.

Since its registration in 1955 usage of the MMB Certification Trade Mark – “Farmhouse Cheddar Cheese” – has been restricted to makers who meet certain key requirements, namely that:

- The cheese is made on the farm
- Milk, all or part of which, must come from the maker’s own cows
- The cheese is produced using in vat methods (rather than moving belt or cheddarmasters)
- The cheese is made by hand
- The cheese is subject to independent grading at between 2 to 4 months – only cheese which has unique characteristics of Farmhouse Cheddar may use the mark
- Cheese sold as Farmhouse Cheddar bearing the logo must be kept for at least 9 months

The independent inspection of the cheese and the routine checking of the farmhouse cheesemaker’s premises have been a regular feature of the verification process for true farmhouse cheddar.

4.8 Labelling

N/A